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**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY**

**NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE**

**A RECONFIGURATION OF EVERYTHING  
THAT ALREADY EXISTS:  
BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS AND THE QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW**

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Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has made several attempts to re-fashion its armed forces for the post-Cold War world. The most recent effort, called the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), was a study that started with high hopes. Last year, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense John White called the QDR an opportunity to analyze "what we do, why we do it, how we do it, and how we pay for it."<sup>1</sup> Another official boasted that the survey would "'put everything on the table,' including Army, Navy, and Air Force budget shares and de-emphasize the goal of fighting two nearly simultaneous regional wars."<sup>2</sup> In the end, the QDR fell short of those marks. A forecast that the review would simply be a "reconfiguration of everything that already exists" proved a more accurate assessment than the lofty rhetoric of defense officials.<sup>3</sup>

Why did the QDR fail to meet its goals? There was probably little hope that the study would ever match the radical expectations espoused by some. Those statements reflect an assumption that the study would be carried out in a "rational" process, unsullied by organizational politics and pressures. While there were many agencies and personalities that affected the QDR in some way, it was the actions of the Army, Navy, and Air Force that played the major roles in shaping the final report. Understanding the outcome of the QDR must begin by examining how the services practiced bureaucratic politics.

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<sup>1</sup> Deputy Secretary of Defense John White, quoted in Mark Thompson, "Defensive Thinking on Defense," Time, November 30, 1996, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Capaccio, "'Everything on the Table' in New Strategy Review," Defense Week, November 19, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor, quoted in "DoD Reviews Aims to Solidify Force Capability," Defense News, December 9-15, 1996, 20.

## Background

Congress mandated the Quadrennial Defense Review in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997 as a way to "re-engineer" the Pentagon to meet the security demands of the United States<sup>4</sup> The legislation did not, however, provide any specifics for the analysis, leaving Pentagon officials free to develop their own assumptions for the study From the beginning, defense executives made it clear that the QDR would not be an exhaustive review of the national security strategy of engagement and enlargement Instead, it was more narrowly focused on studying how the Department of Defense could meet those national security requirements given a fixed budget of \$250 billion Although this restricted scope was less than some observers had hoped for, it was not an inconsiderable task Even a limited review could have resulted in significant changes to the composition of the armed services, the reliance of the United States on allied partners, or the use of the reserves<sup>5</sup>

A final assumption of the QDR was that the Department of Defense needed to increase the amount of money spent on researching and developing new weapons and equipment to about \$60 billion a year In recent years these so-called modernization accounts had been robbed to pay for ongoing operations, a necessary short-term expedient but a pattern that risked the long-term readiness and viability of the American military Officials initially hoped to pay for modernization by shrinking the defense

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<sup>4</sup> "Liberman Hopes to Strengthen Democrats and Defense Ties," Defense Week February 10 1997 12

<sup>5</sup> William S. Cohen, Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office 1997), 2-12, Capaccio, "Everything," 4, idem "Inside the Quadrennial Defense Review," Defense Week, December 16, 1996, 8

infrastructure, but it soon became apparent that some reduction of the services would also be necessary<sup>6</sup>

Although the QDR report was due to Congress by May 15, 1997, truly serious work on the project did not begin until February, when William Cohen arrived as the new Secretary of Defense. Many in the Pentagon thought that Cohen might ask Congress for a delay in order to put his imprint on the report, but he quickly made it clear that he had no intention of asking for an extension<sup>7</sup>. While his own experience in Congress may have made Cohen eager to meet the deadline, one official suggested that the new Secretary also wanted to "show Congress that he can deliver a major report on time"<sup>8</sup>. Whatever the merits of this explanation, the rush had several impacts. First, some of the on-going analytical studies that could have been used to reduce duplication among the services or find alternative and cheaper ways to accomplish certain missions would not be available<sup>9</sup>. Second, the time limit made it impractical to carry out any new studies that could have illuminated alternative force structures or options. Finally, the time pressure made it difficult to build up any bureaucratic consensus for new innovations, making easier for the services to advance their own agendas.

In the end, the QDR endorsed some changes at the margins, but no fundamental shift in the status quo. The national military strategy was modified to include smaller-scale operations, such as peacekeeping in Bosnia or Haiti, but there was no

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen, Report 85-88, Tony Capaccio, "Cohen Procurement and QDR," Defense Week January 27 1997 3

<sup>7</sup> General Thomas Moorman, quoted in Tom Breen "Cohen to Services: May 15 Deadline for QDR Report Must be Met," Defense Daily, March 16 1997, 462, "On Time, On Budget " Aviation Week and Space Technology, February 10 1997, 19

<sup>8</sup> Breen, 462

<sup>9</sup> "On Time, On Budget "

reconsideration of the plan to counter two major regional contingencies, renamed major theater wars. Some programs for new weapons were cut back, but none was canceled outright. In addition, the report recommended cutting 60,000 active duty troops, 55,000 reservists, and 80,000 civilians.<sup>10</sup> Although the policy decisions in the QDR can be justified as the result of the careful weighing of alternatives in a rational manner, in fact the report bears the heavy imprint of a bureaucratic struggle.

### **Bureaucratic Politics and Service Perspectives**

Whatever the claims to the contrary, from the perspectives of the services the attempt to find the necessary money for modernization and the constrained time limits of the QDR reduced the effort to an attempt to cut organizational budgets. This was familiar territory for the services, and they went into bureaucratic battle with the same methods and perspectives they had always used.

The actions of the services during the QDR fit the paradigm of bureaucratic politics developed by Graham Allison and Morton Halperin. They argue that in any large bureaucracy, like the Defense Department, policies are not made by single decision makers, but by large organizations and individuals inside the bureaucracy "who compete in attempting to affect both governmental decisions and the actions of their government."<sup>11</sup> In sum, decisions are not made "by single rational choice, but by pulling and hauling" between groups.<sup>12</sup> Understanding the service's institutional reactions in this

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<sup>10</sup> Cohen, Report 12, 22

<sup>11</sup> Graham T. Allison and Morton Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications," World Politics: A Quarterly Journal 40 (Summer 1972): 42

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 43

"pulling and hauling" can best be analyzed by using Carl Builder's framework of service personalities described in The Masks of War. While not without its faults, Builder's study provides the best insight into how the services react in bureaucratic politics.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Army**

Builder argues that the Army concerns itself first and foremost with its readiness to fight, but when forced to talk about the size of the force, the service focuses on people rather than equipment. The arguments put forth during the QDR ran closely to form, early stories about the review emphasized the Army's vulnerability and concern about losing up to two divisions.<sup>14</sup> Whether these stories were planted as part of a clever ploy to gain support for the Army, or represented genuine concerns, or both, they highlight the Army's focus on people versus technology.

The Army unveiled a "framework for the future" in November, 1996 to help bolster their arguments in the public domain. An Army official familiar with Army Vision 2010 admitted that it was part of an effort to prevent the Army from losing any missions, and the accompanying budget authority, to another service. Army leaders reportedly felt especially vulnerable to claims that they should give up theater air defense and space management to the Air Force. Army Vision 2010 also expressed service concerns about sacrificing active duty forces to technological solutions, such as the claims voiced by both the Navy and the Air Force about the efficacy of long-range precision strikes. While admitting that these strikes had the power to "deny or destroy."

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<sup>13</sup> Carl Builder, The Masks of War (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> Tom Ricks, "Armed Forces Prepare to Battle One Another for Funds," Wall Street Journal, February 6, 1997, 1. John Mintz, "The Next Big Military Maneuver," Washington Post, December 3, 1996, C-1.

the Army maintained that "direct, continuing, and comprehensive control over [the] land, its resources, and people" was necessary to achieve political and military objectives <sup>15</sup> Obviously, this was a role that only the Army could fulfill. In addition, large land forces were important because they provided the "most flexible and versatile capabilities for meeting commander-in-chief force requirements" <sup>16</sup> Finally, the Army vision for the future posited that it was relatively easy to build weapons -- it was much harder to build an Army <sup>17</sup>

As the QDR moved forward in the spring of 1997, and it became apparent that the savings necessary to achieve the \$60 billion goal for modernization could not be met by reducing the infrastructure alone, the Army began to openly criticize the budgetary focus of the debate. In early April, an e-mail message from Lieutenant General Jay Garner, the Assistant Chief of Staff of the Army and leader of their QDR effort, was leaked to Defense News. The message reflected the Army's support for Secretary Cohen in his search for a strategy-based versus a budget-driven QDR. The internal memo maintained that if there were no changes to the present plan the Army would lose about 56,000 soldiers, enough to fill three heavy divisions. While the message helped generate outside support against the move, it was also shrewdly written to limit retribution within the Defense Department. Instead of criticizing the Secretary of Defense for the problem, the

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Colin Clark and Tony Capaccio, "Army's New Vision Takes On 'Invalid' Airpower Theories " Defense Week November 12 1996, 1

<sup>16</sup> Ibid , 11

<sup>17</sup> Ibid



memo depicts the Army as a staunch ally of Cohen in defeating unnamed bureaucratic budget watchers whose only concern is the bottom line <sup>18</sup>

Two weeks later a memo from Army Chief of Staff Dennis Reimer to the Secretary of Defense was also leaked. This letter reiterated the claim that the Army was being unfairly targeted for budget cuts. Reimer objected to the "salamí-slice method" of force reductions and blasted attempts to turn the QDR into a budget-driven exercise to finance the modernization bill. Reimer urged Cohen to continue the effort to develop a coherent strategy and then make decisions about reductions. As the Army chief knew, the strategy portion of the QDR was moving ahead at the same time as the other decisions were being made and the time pressure of the endeavor made it impossible to perform the studies sequentially. Whatever the rational merits of the Army's position, cloaking the arguments as failures to meet the national strategy was an adroit move. This position made it difficult for other organizations to dispute the Army's contentions and, not surprisingly, also let the Army make the best case for maintaining its current size <sup>19</sup>

The Army's leaders must have been pleased with the outcome of the QDR. Although they shouldered the highest share of the force reductions -- 15,000 active duty, 45,000 reservists, and 33,700 civilians -- in reality these figures only represented a small loss in what the Army saw as the most important category -- active duty soldiers. Because the Army only had 481,000 people on active duty, 14,000 fewer than their authorized strength of 495,000, the 15,000 reduction meant the loss of only 1,000 troops.

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<sup>18</sup> Colin Clark, "Garner No To Any QDR Army Cuts," Defense Week, March 13, 1997, 6, idem, "Major Force Structure Cuts Loom, Says Top Army Official," Defense Week, April 14, 1997, 1-12, idem "QDR Panel to Praise, Question Pentagon Strategy," Defense Week, May 15, 1997, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Colin Clark "Cut DoD Agencies, Not Army Troops Army Chief to Cohen," Defense Week April 28, 1997, 1, 14.

This minimal cut meant that the Army would make no organizational changes and retain the current structure of 4 active corps, 10 divisions, and two armored cavalry regiments. In comparison to the early fears of a two-division cut, the outcome could only be construed as a "win" for the Army<sup>20</sup>

## **The Navy**

While the Army made extensive, and apparently convincing, arguments for the number of active-duty soldiers needed in the current strategy, the Navy approached the QDR from an entirely different tack. Builder maintains that the Navy measures itself first by the number of capital ships in the inventory and then by the total number of ships. In addition, he points out that the Navy "never relie[s] on analysis for requirements," those requirements are derived from the "experience and traditions" of the Navy<sup>21</sup>

In preparation for the QDR the Navy cast itself as the dominant service for the most common uses of military force, both now and in the future. They emphasized the need for 12 carrier battle groups, asserting that 12 was the "minimum the U.S. can maintain without jeopardizing national security."<sup>22</sup> While preserving the capital fleet of carriers was important, another priority for the Navy was sustaining the production of F/A-18 E/Fs, their newest fighter aircraft. But the Navy did not conduct extensive analyses or studies to bolster their position in the QDR, trusting instead on naval authority. There was no effort by the Navy to produce an equivalent to Army Vision

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<sup>20</sup> Cohen, Report, 49, Colin Clark "Army Bears Brunt of QDR Force Cuts " Defense Week, May 20, 1997, 1, 2

<sup>21</sup> Builder 21, 107

<sup>22</sup> Ricks 1, Mark Walsh "QDR: Navy Defends Programs, Worries About Cuts " Defense Week, February 18, 1997, 6

2010. although they did hope to update their doctrine emphasizing forward presence<sup>23</sup>  
Instead of analysis, Navy officials highlighted the traditional arguments for carriers the  
ability to transport combat power where it was needed without the permission of other  
countries<sup>24</sup>

During the QDR debate there was a notable lack of coverage about the Navy's  
position, a sure sign that things were going well from their perspective -- a suspicion  
confirmed by the outcome In the end, the sea services emerged from the QDR debate in  
relatively good shape The Navy did lose about 18,000 active duty sailors, and it was  
forced to slash the F/A-18 E/F buy from 1,000 down to a minimum of 548 This was a  
somewhat deceptive loss, however, since the initial number was predicated on a very high  
attrition rate and was already being scaled back In the all-important category of capital  
ships they held steady They suffered no reductions in the number of carrier groups or the  
accompanying air wings The total number of surface combatants fell, but only slightly,  
from 128 today to 116 in 2003 The biggest losses for the Navy came in the submarine  
force, which will shrink from 73 down to 50 While not a total victory, it was a very  
favorable outcome<sup>25</sup>

## **The Air Force**

The stance of the Air Force during the QDR also parallels the "service  
personality" Builder discovered during his research He views the Air Force as a service

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<sup>23</sup> Clark and Capaccio, 11

<sup>24</sup> Walsh, 6

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, Report, 50-51 Clark "QDR Force Cuts," 2 The changes to the Marine Corps were slight They only lost 1,800 active duty members and the structure of the Marine Expeditionary Forces remained unchanged

that relies on and believes in extensive analysis and measures itself against technology. According to Builder, "For the Air Force, the aerodynamic performance and technological quality of its aircraft have always been a higher priority than the number."<sup>26</sup>

During the QDR debate the Air Force remained true to form. In preparation for the review the Air Force inaugurated long-range planning efforts to analyze and develop a vision for the future. This 18-month project looked into all areas of the force and culminated in a week-long meeting of senior Air Force leaders. The decisions made at the conference were summarized and published in a glossy document called Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force, which was unveiled to great fanfare at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in late November. While the document alludes to the importance of people, the thrust of the vision is that future technological advances will allow the nation to depend on air and space power for security.<sup>27</sup> The Air Force also tried to argue that the best way to reduce spending was by eliminating Army divisions and Navy carrier groups, items that cost much more over a 35 year lifetime than even the most expensive aircraft. Logically, the nation could rely on air and space assets to accomplish the same tasks at lower costs.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike the Army's public rhetoric during the QDR process, the Air Force stayed away from debating issues in the media. Other than the public announcement of the new strategic vision, there were few leaks during the debate itself. For the most part this was intentional. General Ronald R. Fogleman, the Air Force Chief of Staff, was determined

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<sup>26</sup> Builder, 21, 104-105

<sup>27</sup> United States Air Force Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1996), passim

<sup>28</sup> Walsh, 16. Personal observations of the author while deputy director of the Air Force Chief of Staff's Operations Group.

to prevent a repetition of the open hostility between the services that emerged during the Commission on Roles and Missions two years earlier<sup>29</sup> Fogleman maintained that it was impossible for him to engage in an open brawl over QDR issues and then expect to get cooperation from the other service chiefs when they discussed matters as the Joint Chiefs of Staff<sup>30</sup>

Rather than engage in an open forum, the Air Force fought its battles inside the conference room. When it became apparent that there would be no radical restructuring in the Defense Department, and that cuts were going to be shared among the various services, the Air Force exhibited its traditional bias towards new technology and high performance aircraft. The key system for the Air Force during these discussions was the F-22, an air superiority fighter designed to replace the aging F-15. The F-22 was under intense scrutiny because of its cost, but Air Force officials were determined to keep it, even at the expense of losing other aircraft or people. In an astute bureaucratic move Fogleman himself proposed cutting production of the F-22. He did not make the proposal out of altruistic reasons, or because he had reevaluated strategic requirements, but in the hope of salvaging the aircraft and stopping "an even more damaging blow."<sup>31</sup>

To produce their share of the needed savings Air Force leaders gave up 26,900 people, a larger reduction of active duty members than the other services both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the current force. As a result, the Air Force will restructure intermediate headquarters and fighter wings for a total loss of about one

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<sup>29</sup> Tony Capaccio "Army Air Force Sniping Muted," Defense Week May 27, 1997, 5

<sup>30</sup> Personal observation

<sup>31</sup> Tony Capaccio, "Infrastructure Cuts Loom As Last Great Cold War Struggle," Defense Week, May 20, 1997 1, 3

fighter wing. The procurement of the Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS), an advanced battle management platform, was also reduced from 19 to 13, and other systems were curtailed as well. Most importantly though, the Air Force hung on to the F-22, albeit in smaller numbers. The total buy was cut from 438 to 339, and annual production scaled back from 48 per year to 36. Despite the reduction in the number of aircraft, Air Force leaders "won" by avoiding an outright cancellation of the F-22.<sup>32</sup>

### **Other factors**

In addition to the actions of the services, other defense agencies played a role in shaping the final outcome of the QDR report. Although technically considered a "collaborative effort between the Office of the Secretary of Defense [OSD] and the Joint Staff,"<sup>33</sup> in reality OSD maintained firm control over the process. The effort was headed by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Requirements Edward Warner and Program Analysis and Evaluation Director William Lynn. Both had been part of the Bottom Up Review that first developed the strategy of needing to counter two contingencies. Neither man seemed prepared to revisit the issue, notwithstanding occasional statements to the contrary.<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, the QDR did not significantly

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<sup>32</sup> Tony Capaccio, "QDR Found F-22, F-18 Program Plans Unrealistic," Defense Week, May 19, 1997, 1, idem, "Infrastructure," 1-3. Personal observations. Of course, not everyone felt as sanguine about the outcome. One Air Force general officer involved in the process thought a "win" for the Air Force would have been the loss of two divisions to the Army and a several carriers for the Navy. He was somewhat dismayed by the actual results.

<sup>33</sup> William S. Cohen, "Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review," Joint Forces Quarterly 16 (Summer 1997) 9.

<sup>34</sup> Capaccio, "Everything," 4, idem, "Inside," 8-10, Daniel Smith, "Bureaucracy, Infighting Bog Pentagon's Defense Review," Defense News, March 31-April 6, 1997, Rick Newman, "Getting Ready for the Wrong War?" U.S. News & World Report, May 12, 1997, 35.

alter the necessity of fighting and winning two major theater wars "nearly simultaneously," although it did recognize the need to address other operations<sup>35</sup>

Personalities were also a factor in how the armed services approached the QDR. Lieutenant General Jay Garner, head of the Army's effort, had been part of the Commission on Roles and Missions. His counterpart in the Air Force, Major General Charles Link, was a veteran of the same struggle. While there was a lack of public feuding during the QDR, the personal enmity built up during earlier enterprises bred distrust and hostility among the participants<sup>36</sup>. While these other factors might not function as powerfully as the "service personalities," they imparted their own impetus into the debate and also helped shape the QDR outcome.

## **Conclusion**

Despite early expectations for a successful reappraisal of the Defense Department, the QDR report has been criticized on a number of grounds, but the most telling critique may be the lack of any linkage between strategy, force structure, operational concepts, and modernization plans<sup>37</sup>. In short, the QDR resembles less the product of a "single rational choice" and more the "pulling and hauling" of the bureaucratic process<sup>38</sup>. That should come as no surprise. While there were many contributing factors, the bureaucratic politics practiced by the Army, Navy, and Air Force provide the major explanation for the

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<sup>35</sup> Cohen, Report, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Tony Capaccio, "Army Readies for Defense Review Food Fight With Air Advocates," Defense Week, November 18, 1996, 15. *idem*, "Sniping," 5.

<sup>37</sup> Tony Capaccio, "National Defense Panel Warns of QDR Budget Risks," Defense Week, May 19, 1997, 1, 15. Colin Clark, "Analysts: Review's Cuts Too Small, Strategy Sound," Defense Week, May 19, 1997, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Allison and Halperin, 43.

outcome of the report. Not surprisingly, each service advanced its own organizational agenda during the process. Without top level leadership attuned to and focused on countering these pressures, the result was disjointed. No study completed in the Pentagon will ever be perfect, but a better understanding of how the services see themselves and practice bureaucratic politics may help future leaders achieve better results.



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